



DRAFT Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Executive Director Search Minutes Saturday, March 7, 2026

This was a hybrid meeting as allowed by An Act relative to extending certain COVID-19 measures adopted during the state of emergency, extending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c.30A sec.20 until June 30, 2027.

I. Call to Order & Open Meeting Law Statement

Search Chair Buck Donovan called the meeting to order at 9:45am. He stated that BRPC was recording the meeting and said that if anyone else wanted to record it, they needed to inform him. Breanna Steele from iBerkshires recorded the meeting.

II. Roll Call

Caitlin Davis, Office Administrator, read the roll call:

Members Present:

Buck Donovan, Search Chair, Lee Delegate
Malcolm Fick, BRPC Chair, Great Barrington Alternate
Sheila Irvin, Berkshire Brownfields Committee Chair, Pittsfield Delegate
Kyle Hanlon, At-Large, North Adams Delegate
John Duval, Former Adams Alternate
Laura Kittross, BRPC Staff- joined at 9:48am
Marybeth Mitts, Select Board Chair

Staff Present:

Tom Matuszko, Executive Director
Caitlin Davis, Office Administrator
Marianne Sniezek, Office Manager
Karen Pelto, Grant Specialist-Berkshire Funding Focus
Clete Kus, Transportation Program Manager
Melissa Provencher, Environmental and Energy Program Manager

Others Present:

Mark Hawthorne, Alternate, Lanesborough
Jay Meczywor, Alternate, Adams
Mary McGurn, Delegate, Egremont, At-Large
Doug McNally, Delegate, Windsor, Chair, Commission Development Committee

Mark Smith, Delegate, Lenox, Chair Environmental Review Committee
Peter Traub, Delegate, Cheshire
Breanna Steele, iBerkshires

III. Vote to Approve the Minutes of the BRPC Executive Director Search Committee Meeting Minutes of February 11, 2026*

Kyle Hanlon motioned to approve the Minutes from the 2.11.26 Search Committee minutes. Malcolm Fick seconded the motion.

There was no discussion on the motion.

The motion passed with affirmative votes from: Buck Donovan, Malcolm Fick, Sheila Irvin, Kyle Hanlon, and Marybeth Mitts.

John Duval abstained and Laura Kittross did not vote.

IV. Open Comments from Berkshire Regional Planning Commission Delegates and Alternate Delegates, not to be further discussed at this meeting by the Search Committee.

There were no comments from Alternates or Delegates.

V. Description of the Interview Process

There would be ten questions, only asked by the search committee. The questions would alternate between search committee members, and the interviews would be 45 minutes long. There would be a separate executive session meeting to vote and approve previous executive session meeting minutes.

VI. Interview with Jason Zogg for the BRPC Executive Director Position

The candidate was asked to state their background.

- a. Professional self and career.**
- b. Include why they were interested in this position and describe how this position fit within their overall career goals and professional advancement.**

Jason answered that he has always worked in planning, undergraduate work, and professional work in non-profits large and small, public, and private sectors. He saw himself as a jack of all trades, with work in HR, IT, urban renewal, transportation and had built organizations from the ground up. Every job he had worked there was a controlled measure of collaboration and influence with creating and building relationships.

The candidate was asked to provide their vision of what BRPC should

be in the next 5 years, including their thoughts about planning, implementation, service provision, and non-traditional RPA activities.

- **Would that differ from how BRPC operates now, and if so, how so.**
- **Provide details about how that vision would be implemented, giving our financial structure, especially with the uncertainty of funding from the federal government.**
- **What ideas would they have to expand our funding opportunities.**

Jason answered that he would want to make BRPC the best RPA in MA. He would want to bring communities together and focus on regionalization, based on the competition in Eastern MA. As BRPC is reliant on funding, he would focus on scenario planning and taking a reasoned approach to emerging trends. He would also have multiple back up plans for funding to figure out what would and wouldn't get funded.

The Executive Director plays many roles. The candidate was asked to describe their approaches in the following situations, describe how they might be different, and provide brief examples, if possible.

- **Working with legislators to advance BPRC's work and goals**
- **Working with state agencies**
- **Working with municipal officials**
- **Working with non-profits and community groups**
- **Working with the press**

Jason answered that at a county/local level, he would be mindful of asks and leverage the relationship. He would find the pain points to understand and customize communication with them. For non-profits, he would want to learn their origin story and what drives them. For press, he would want to be more deliberate with wording and using a script. Jason mentioned the use of a social media toolkit, which John Duval asked for more clarification on. Jason stated that having a clear plan for language, needs, photos and tag/sharing whether it be internal or external social media posting would be important.

Laura Kittross asked a follow up question about location, going from cities to a more rural area such as the Berkshires and how that interaction would work. Jason responded that technology has been helpful in the last few years with communication and meetings, especially when you can't be everywhere. There would be a level of persistence needed to work with government agencies.

The candidate was asked how they would spend their first six months in the Executive Directors position.

- **Explain what their strategy would be and how they would plan to implement it.**
- **Include how they would reach out to the 32 municipalities to acquaint themselves with their needs. What were the three most important things they would want each municipality to take away from that initial meeting.**

Jason stated that listening would be the most important thing in the first six months. Understanding the staff, improvements and looking at trends for the next five years. He would want to create relationships, not only with staff but with the towns and where we receive grants from. He would ask simple questions to extract that information. He would want to do a 'whirlwind' tour, getting to know the organization and the municipalities and state agencies, via meetings and events.

BRPC's policy body consists of representatives of the municipalities, Delegates and Alternates. Many Delegates and Alternates do not actively participate in the Commission, and many towns do not avail themselves of funding opportunities.

- **The candidate was asked what steps they would take to engage these towns more fully.**

Jason answered that he would look at time commitment issues and help them better understand the process of what would need to be done. He would work on relationship building and building trust, whether in person or at events. He would take the initiative to reach out to individual towns and work to understand their nuisances. Also, he would factor in how people like to communicate. Would this be done in person, via call or email? Would there need to be something posted to gain interest or a response?

BRPC has experienced recent growth, but growth is not guaranteed. The candidate was asked what experience they have with downsizing.

- **How would they face a period of possible reduced funding**

Jason answered that he went through something similar with his current organization. He would prioritize what would have the most impact and what could fall to the bottom to review at another time. He would take full ownership of the final outcome. From an administrative perspective, he would look at other places where savings and changes could be made.

As it is currently structured, BPRC has strong Program Areas.

- **The candidate was asked how they would plan to work with program managers**
- **Where would they give them autonomy/independence and where would they need/want to be involved in the decision-making**
- **How would they evaluate program managers, especially in their interactions with municipalities**
- **Describe the most successful measurement they would use and how they would help a program manager improve performance shortfalls.**

Jason would want to focus on the organization's culture. He wouldn't want to micromanage but be a thought partner and problem solver. He would want to challenge the program managers. In terms of evaluation, he would want to observe and be aware of current things happening. He would also want to see patterns of interaction between different cities and towns and what's happening at a state

political level. Jason gave an example of a former staff member who was on a performance improvement plan. He spent a lot of time with this person, accessing their strengths and challenges. They were able to realign this person's projects to better fit their needs to get work done and reduce unnecessary tasks.

The candidate was asked to cite specific examples of how they build and sustain an agency that works as a team, especially in an era of teleworking.

- **What is the single most important trait they value in an employee**
- **How would they recruit and retain good staff at all levels**

Jason answered that he valued energy, passion, entrepreneurial spirit and being a self-starter as the most important traits in an employee. He would create a workplace where people didn't feel siloed. He would want to make sure staff have deep work/quiet time and that they felt valued in the culture they're creating at work. He would evaluate telework based on employee's meeting schedules and how work was getting done, whether in person or remotely.

VII. Interview with Laura Brennan for the BRPC Executive Director Position

The candidate was asked to state their background.

- a. **Professional self and career.**
- b. **Include why they were interested in this position and describe how this position fits within your overall career goals and professional advancement**

Laura answered that her career has been rooted in non-profits and in Berkshire County. Serving as current Assistant Director at BRPC had exposed her to what the executive director does and had several opportunities from Tom, such as being part of statewide discussions and what it meant to be the executive director of this type of organization. She felt confident this was the right move in her career.

The candidate was asked to provide their vision of what BRPC should be in the next 5 years, including their thoughts about planning, implementation, service provision, and non-traditional RPA activities.

- **Would that differ from how BRPC operates now, and if so, how so.**
- **Provide details about how that vision would be implemented, giving our financial structure, especially with the uncertainty of funding from the federal government.**
- **What ideas would they have to expand our funding opportunities.**

Laura answered that the organization has been in reactive mode and that it could work with more confidence by looking at past projects that succeeded to better collaborate and build upon relationships with municipalities. Expanding funding by taking a closer look at non-profits. BRPC was currently in a good place with BTI. Using the tools we have for government funding could elevate our needs further.

With shared ties, we could work at the speed of cohesion to strengthen the relationships within the region.

The Executive Director plays many roles. The candidate was asked to describe their approaches in the following situations, describe how they might be different, and provide brief examples, if possible,

- **Working with legislators to advance BPRC's work and goals**
- **Working with state agencies**
- **Working with municipal officials**
- **Working with non-profits and community groups**
- **Working with the press**

Laura answered that working with state agencies would be applying for grants; not being afraid to ask for resources and earmarking projects for the state budget, while looping in elected officials. The cultural districts work was an economic development opportunity with municipal officials, as well as working with stakeholders and town staff and officials. For non-profits, Laura mentioned the CEDs committee and the enormous priority to pitch outreach to community groups. Laura's background in marketing and communication helped with learning different skill sets to work with the press, including press releases, and printed and visual media.

The candidate was asked how they would spend their first six months in the Executive Directors position.

- **Explain what their strategy will be and how they plan to implement it.**
- **Include how they would reach out to the 32 municipalities to acquaint yourself with their needs. What are the three most important things they would want each municipality to take away from that initial meeting.**

Laura answered that the first six months in the role would be an internal transition. Resetting expectations and meeting with staff and their teams to get up to speed on projects, needs, concerns and taking the time to absorb and listen. She would also work with the town administrators and managers to offer help with planning, reaching out to select boards. Another opportunity to listen and share/offer BRPC's services.

BRPC's policy body consists of representatives of the municipalities, Delegates and Alternates. Many Delegates and Alternates do not actively participate in the Commission, and many towns do not avail themselves of funding opportunities.

- **The candidate was asked what steps they would take to engage these towns more fully.**

Laura answered that we could offer to delegates and alternates the logistics of this process. Since it is a hard to explain model, we would need to have a good understanding of the mechanics on how they could be more involved and why they

would want to be more involved. There would need to be better engagement. Malcolm Fick asked the follow up question of if we have enough to offer the smaller hilltowns. Laura answered yes, we do have the tools and would not want to overwhelm them. She stated we could offer assistance to the communities large or small and remain respectful of their needs.

BRPC has experienced recent growth, but growth is not guaranteed. The candidate was asked what experience they have with downsizing.

- **How would they face a period of possible reduced funding**

Laura answered that while she had been at BRPC during the most amount of growth, there was still amazing potential. Having outgrown several administrative models, we have been working to adopt tools to work more efficiently in the office and hybrid. BRPC is better positioned to scale up and down, as we had embraced projects and initiatives we didn't see coming. One suggestion would be staff learning new program areas and learning new skills.

As it is currently structured, BPRC has strong Program Areas.

- **The candidate asked how they would plan to work with program managers**
- **Where would they give them autonomy/independence and where would you need/want to be involved in the decision-making**
- **How would they evaluate program managers, especially in their interactions with municipalities**
- **Describe the most successful measurement they would use and how they would help a program manager improve performance shortfalls.**

Laura answered that she would work with the program managers one on one and encourage overlap. She would also encourage autonomy and independence. She would be responsive to the communities and want to learn as much as possible.

The candidate was asked to cite specific examples of how they would build and sustain an agency that works as a team, especially in an era of teleworking.

- **What is the single most important trait they value in an employee**
- **How would they recruit and retain good staff at all levels**

Laura answered that being a problem solver and confident in it being part of their role was the most important trait they valued in an employee. While there already is a good team in place at BRPC, she would want to challenge staff to build culture when not in person. For example, staff meetings have included icebreakers at the start, which has expanded comfort levels and shown that fun can be had working together. In terms of retention levels, current recruitment approaches have upgraded. We have used tools in the past and breathed new life into planning for better recruitment and retention.

What had been the most challenging professional inter-personnel interaction they have dealt with. Did they learn anything from how it transpired that

would inform future personnel interactions.

Laura gave an example of a past supervisor who wanted to coach her in a certain way that didn't work and was a detriment to her ability to deliver on tasks. What she took from this was that not speaking up or speaking the same language was to be more mindful of understanding and communicating needs better so that the relationship could work.

VIII. Discussion of the Hiring Process Next Steps

A search committee meeting would be scheduled for March 11, 2026 via zoom to review the candidates and vote on this session's minutes.

IX. Adjournment

Kyle Hanlon motioned to adjourn the meeting. John Duval seconded the motion.

The motion passed with affirmative votes without discussion from: Buck Donovan, Malcolm Fick, Sheila Irvin, Kyle Hanlon, John Duval, Laura Kittross and Marybeth Mitts.

The meeting adjourned 11:50am.